

Record Searchlight

THURSDAY, AUGUST 13, 2015

redding.com

REDDING, CALIFORNIA // 93 CENTS

Town Creek runs blue at times from copper

■ Water's acid level kills most fish, bugs

By Damon Arthur
darthur@redding.com
530-225-8226

While Colorado has its orange river, Shasta County has blue and red creeks. The Animas River in southwest Colorado made headlines this past week after millions of

gallons of contaminated water from an abandoned mine gushed into the river turning it into a yellowish-orange.

Here in the North State, Town Creek has likely been running blue at certain times of the year for more than 100 years, said Clint Snyder, assistant executive officer of the Central Valley Water Quality Control Board in Redding.

Copper in the water from the abandoned Bully Hill mine turns the water

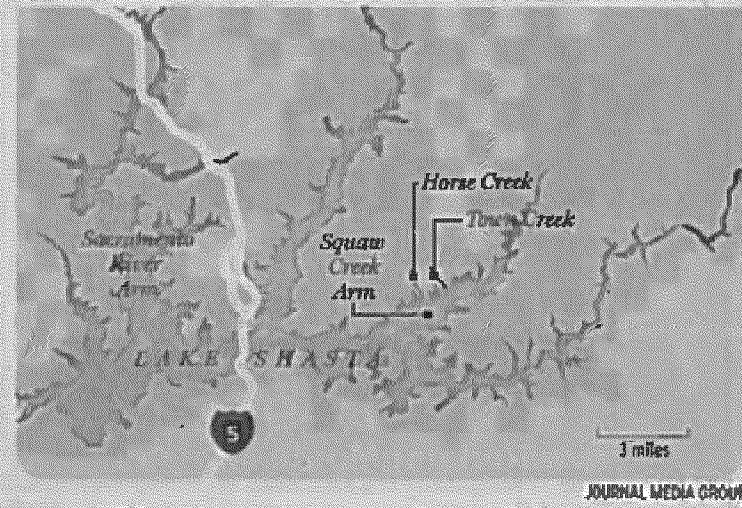
blue and heightens the acid level to the point where most fish and bugs cannot survive in the water, he said.

"There is no immediate danger to the public who come in contact with the impacted water bodies, however, the public should avoid contact with these waters," Snyder said.

"Concentrations of copper in the impacted reaches of Town Creek

See CREEKS, 2A

COLORFUL CREEKS FLOW INTO LAKE SHASTA



CREEKS

from 1A

and Bucks Gulch are lethal to many aquatic organisms, including fish, which is why these organisms are not found in either stream," he said in an email.

Bucks Gulch, a tributary to Horse Creek, runs an orange-rusty color from high levels of iron in the water from the abandoned Rising Star Mine, he said. Both creeks run into the Squaw Creek Arm of Shasta Lake.

Cleanup on both creeks has been underway since 1998, he said. Snyder said that because of safeguards built into the cleanup sites on the two creeks, it is unlikely there could be an incident similar to what happened in Colorado.

There, a U.S. Environ-

mental Protection Agency official inadvertently unleashed untreated mine waste into a creek that runs into the Animus River.

When the treated water from either of the creeks hits Lake Shasta, it becomes diluted to the point where it is no longer toxic to fish and other animals, he said.

Snyder said there have not been any fish kills in the area since cleanup of the mines began. While metal levels in the streams have been reduced by cleanup at the sites, they are still above acceptable thresholds, he said.

Copper levels in Horse Creek have been reduced from 6,600 parts per billion to 4,700, while the acceptable limit is 4.1 parts per billion, he said. Copper levels in Town Creek are 890 parts per billion, down from 3,600, he said.

from 3,600, he said.

The creeks run clean above the mines but not below, he said. They also flow through private property owned by the current mine owners.

While the areas aren't fenced, there are signs warning people not to trespass and to avoid the creeks.

Andrea Capps, a spokeswoman for the Shasta-

Andrea Capps, a spokeswoman for the Shasta-Trinity National Forest, which manages Lake Shasta, said the agency is aware of the mines and cleanup operations in the area.

"This is a known situation. This not completely out of the norm," Capps said.

Indeed, abandoned mines similar to those on Horse and Town creeks are common around Lake Shasta. There are 15 to 20 similar mines in what is known as the "copper crescent," because of the many former copper mines in the area, Snyder said.

The crescent starts about 20 miles east of Redding along Highway 299 at the Afterthought Mine in Ingot and arcs around Lake Shasta to Highway 299 in the French Gulch area.

299 in the French Gulch area.

The cost of cleanup at the mines is typically paid for by the property owners, Snyder said. And they will be paying for a long time.

The water coming out of the Bully Hill and Rising Star mines will likely need to be treated for many years to come, Snyder said.

You're rich!

SUPER LOTTO: AUG. 12

12 20 10 13 14 15